Finding New Country: Landscapes and Archaeology
June 8, 2006

Sarah Schlanger,
New Mexico State Office
Bureau of Land Management
(505) 438-8454
Sarah_Schlanger@blm.gov

The centennial of the Antiquities Act is very nearly also the 100th birthday of archaeology as a profession in North America. Today, while we continue to celebrate the oldest, the largest, the most elaborate, and the unique among archaeological resources, there's also a growing interest in managing and studying archaeological sites in the larger contexts of both the physical landscapes they occupy and the cultural landscapes which people have created over time. The archaeology-rich monuments BLM is charged with administering—including Canyons of the Ancients, Grand Staircase/Escalante, and Agua Fria—were created to celebrate cultural landscapes. BLM's responsibilities, both within the units of the National Landscape Conservation System and across the public lands, have broadened from the protection and study of individual sites to the management of cultural landscapes, and, increasingly, the management of people and activities on those landscapes today.

Thank you very much for the opportunity to speak today, on the 100th anniversary of the Antiquities Act. The past 100 years have shown us how important the Antiquities Act has been for sites, landscapes, and, for archaeologists. Archaeologists are usually talking about how other people live, how they create sites and landscapes as they work on, build on, and draw their inspiration from the land. But archaeologists make their living from the land, too, and I want to talk today about the special relationship that archaeologists build with the landscapes they work in.

I'll start with some personal history. When I was 17 years old, I got my first chance to get out in the field. I was going to be part of a volunteer crew working for Bob Bettinger, then a shy grad student and now a distinguished professor at the University of California. According to Bob, we'd be working on the eastern slopes of the Sierras.

That was thirty-four years ago. I'll never forget Bob stopping the truck carrying our crew just south of Big Pine, California. We could see the eastern slopes of the Sierras from where we were, down in Owens Valley. As we stared out at the heat waves shimmering across the valley floor, Bob swept his arm across the view—Sierras to Owens Valley and up again to the White and Inyo Mountains. Then he declared: "**This** is your survey area."

We spent that summer and the next surveying for archaeological sites. We saw fantastic things— hunting lookouts and rock art, pinyon camps, and village sites. Because Bob understood that landscapes are shaped by recent events as much as by old ones, he made sure we visited the Alabama gates, where the Owens Valley water, which had made the valley lush and productive, was sent down to Los Angeles, and Manzanar, where

Japanese-Americans were interned during World War II. That summer was my introduction to archaeology and my initiation to the power of landscapes.

I didn't it know then, but when Bob stopped the truck and we all stared out at the Owens Valley, we were carrying out a tradition that goes back to the earliest days of American archaeology.

In the summer of 1907, just after his worked helped shape the Antiquities Act, Edgar Lee Hewett set up his three students—Alfred V. Kidder, Sylvanus Morley, and John Gould Fletcher—at the Holley Ranch in McElmo Canyon, Colorado. Kidder tells us: "Hewett waved an arm, taking in it seemed, about half the world, 'I want you boys to make an archaeological survey of this country. I'll be back in three weeks'."

"Archaeological survey" and "your survey area." For the field archaeologist these are magical words: they are the keys to new worlds. Bob's dramatic introduction to the Owens Valley was his homage to Kidder, to Edgar Lee Hewett, and to the history of our field.

Let's fast forward to the present. When I first talked to Mike Smith about participating in this session, I was looking out over the Ghost Ranch, where Georgia O'Keeffe made her field camp for painting the red rock country of northern New Mexico in the 1940s.

Mike and I talked briefly about cultural landscapes—how archaeologists are increasingly interested in not just collections of sites, but the entire landscapes that become transformed by people as they live there. The landscape in front of me couldn't have been a better example. New Mexico's artists have made it a place of beauty, but it becomes more beautiful still as we learn its history. The Ghost Ranch country is

extraordinarily rich in records of the past: everything from dinosaurs through the full pageant of human experience in the Southwest. What Bob Bettinger taught me, which he learned from Edgar Lee Hewett and A.V. Kidder, is that if you know how to look, you can find landscapes as rich and richer across this country.

Our challenge, as archaeologists, as land managers, as citizens, is how we conserve, protect, preserve, and honor the history held in landscapes.

In the last decades of the 19th century, when the Antiquities Act was being formed, the West was experiencing a population and popularity boom brought about by the American conquest of Spain's colonies, minerals strikes, the developing railroad system and, not insignificantly, the rise of adventure tourism.

Among the first to see the opportunities for the West's open spaces were local ranchers. Five brothers from Mancos—the Wetherill boys—changed the face of American archaeology when they invented themselves as our first heritage tourism outfitters and suppliers of antiquities. The guest list of those who stayed at their Alamo Ranch and took guided expeditions across Colorado, New Mexico, Utah and Arizona reads like a who's-who of the newly rich and the Eastern establishment.

This early heritage tourism industry, plus unregulated collecting and excavating, and conflicts over control of archaeological resources led to the adoption of the Antiquities Act.

The next big boom came after World War II, when post-war adjustments put people on the land in the West in unprecedented numbers. Their supporting infrastructure—roads, flood control, water delivery, and irrigation projects, urban renewal and redevelopment—put archaeological sites in harm's way. Now, we do

archaeological fieldwork as a matter of course when projects are developed that impact the land. But it has been just fifty years since we first mandated archaeological work on the sites in the path of highway construction. And we are only thirty and forty years out from the environmental and cultural heritage protection laws—the Moss Bennett Act, NEPA, NHPA, and ARPA, that were passed as a result of the post-war boom. Archaeology is almost a roadside attraction these days.

Most of the time, we focus on mitigating impacts to sites, one site at a time. We find sites, we assess impacts, and we avoid sites when possible. When projects impact large numbers of sites, we try to study a representative sample as part of our mitigation plans.

When I first started in archaeology, you could wave your arms across much of the country in the West and know that you would be doing the first intensive survey of that landscape. Whether it was the eastern slopes of the Sierras, the pinyon-juniper dotted mesa tops where Canyons of the Ancients is today, or the Seedskadee in Wyoming, you would be in all new country. Forty years later—after the advent of the environmental preservation legislation—that is no longer true. We are still recording archaeological sites at a rapid clip, but we are not often looking at new country. To do that, you need to shift your focus from sites to landscapes.

To date, we have recorded almost 300,000 archaeological sites on the public lands, and we have overseen excavations at more than 10,000. Each year in New Mexico, Colorado, Utah, and Wyoming we add over 1000 sites to our respective state-run databases.

To find these sites, we do intensive field surveys. We have been surveying about half a million acres of public land each year for nearly 20 years. That work represents the largest commitment to surveying federally-managed lands of any agency. Because of the survey work we've been doing, we have a pretty good idea of what kinds of sites we have and where they are likely to be. Have we found every one of the 4 million sites estimated to be on the public lands? No. Do we have a good foundation? Yes.

Today, we are experiencing yet another boom out West, and it is one which is challenging our ability to manage through a site-based model. Arizona and Nevada lead the nation in growth rates, in new housing starts, and the development of new suburbs. Idaho, Utah, New Mexico, Washington, Oregon and California are not far behind.

Over 56 million people visited public lands last year; visitation has nearly doubled in the past twenty years. Fishing, hunting, camping, and target shooting, once public lands mainstays, has been joined by more active pursuits: kayaking, rafting, rock-climbing, endurance running. Everybody shares the land with mountain-bikes, jeeps and SUVs, snowmobiles, and, most recently, three- and four-wheeled all-terrain-vehicles. "Events" and entertainments such as rock-hopping and crawling, speed tests, ultra-marathons, off-highway bike and four-wheel-drive challenges come up constantly. Heritage tourism seems tame by comparison.

This 21st century recreation has created new opportunities for local entrepreneurs. In towns across the West—towns like Moab and Green River, Utah, Mancos and Cortez, Colorado—where the Wetherill brothers took their well-heeled eastern guests—mechanics now make a living fixing up dirt bikes, jeeps, and ATVs and guides take visitors out on four-wheel driving tours. Archaeological sites, especially rock art sites, are

high on the list of places to take these new Western tourists. Heritage tourism is getting a big boost from the new, industrial recreation crowd.

It is still energy production, though, which dominates the archaeology being done on the public lands. In the past eight years alone in New Mexico, we have seen the number of projects that required an archaeological survey under Section 106 rise sharply from about 2500 per year to over 4000. In Wyoming, the project workload has exploded from 2000 to over 6000 a year. We can see the pace picking up in Utah, Montana, and Colorado now; in several years, their trajectories will look like New Mexico and Wyoming.

While we have been working hard taking care of individual sites, the latest boom in interest in the public lands is pushing once again for a landscape-level focus. In the late 19th century, the issues were couched in terms of direct impacts to archaeological sites—looting, unauthorized excavations, rampant visitation and damage—and expressed, quite often, as fights over control of the archaeological resources. In this century, concerns are more likely to be expressed about impacts, both direct and indirect, to the landscapes that contain archaeological sites.

Since 1986, we have had the public's support to set aside nearly 3 million acres in national monuments, and close to 5 million in wilderness areas. BLM manages 15 National Monuments as part of its National Landscape Conservation System, which includes Wilderness Areas, Wild and Scenic Rivers, National Scenic Areas, National Historic Trails, National Scenic Trails, and Areas of Critical Environmental Concern, or ACECs. If we include ACECs, we manage over 21 million acres to preserve and protect unique suites of resources. Several of our monuments, and most of our ACECs,

commemorate the human presence on the land. Agua Fria, Grand Staircase Escalante, and Canyons of the Ancients are this century's monuments to ancient cultural landscapes.

Our challenge for the coming century is to conserve a fragile, but vitally important archaeological record—the 4 million-plus sites that we estimate exist on the public lands. As the Western states fill up, energy demands rise, and recreational users seek open spaces and frontier freedoms, that challenge will grow.

Our strategy for the next century hinges on broadening our views, and the public's views, of the value of archaeological resources and our role in their preservation. We have been focused on individual sites—some "charismatic," or "world-class" and others less so. We are moving towards a view that places archaeological resources within landscapes, environments, and ecosystems. Once a commodity, sites have become an amenity—something that adds intrinsic value to our experience of the public lands.

We are also looking hard at public behavior on the public lands. We would like all who come to bear responsibility for visiting heritage sites respectfully and in non-impacting ways. Citizen stewardship—recruiting and involving each and every person with the public lands—is the only viable strategy that will preserve the vast and varied heritage resources on our public lands into the future.

BLM has developed a variety of public programs and initiatives in this centennial year, including a website, a "Leave No Trace" hiking ethics tag that stresses stewardship of heritage resources, tabletop displays, logos, DVDs, and additional funding for projects ranging from site stabilization to museum displays. That's a start.

The BLM cannot extend even the limited protections afforded by monument designation to all of the public lands. But the public, acting as "citizen stewards," can. As

the populations of the West grow, more people will find their way to the public lands; more demands will be made for special management practices. Our goal is to have every public lands visitor implement "self-regulating," personally-motivated special management practices that will ensure the preservation, protection, and enjoyment of our public lands legacy for future generations.

Thank you again for the chance to represent the Bureau of Land Management, its archaeologists, and the landscapes we work on at this celebration. Our challenge for the next century is to extend the respect and understanding that has given us Agua Fria, Grand Staircase Escalante and Canyons of the Ancients to all the public lands. With 300,000 known sites, and the potential for 4 million or more on the public lands, we need new ways of accomplishing this goal. Moving from a "site by site" approach to a landscape level for management is one method BLM is applying; moving from a public lands visitor and user mindset to one where we are all stewards of the public lands—BLM manager and citizen alike—is another. We want everyone—not just archaeologists—to find new country as they explore our public lands.